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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: A/S Welch Visit to Qatar, April 1

1. Summary: All the Qatari local dailies provided prominent coverage for the visit of NEA A/S David Welch to Qatar on April 1, 2008. The official Qatari News Agency (QNA) published that A/S Welch met with Qatar Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and discussed "bilateral relations and subjects of common interest." The QNA did not mention A/S Welch's meeting with Qatar's Premier and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani. A/S Welch's press roundtable was covered by the seven local dailies with a focus on his remarks regarding the recent Arab Summit in Damascus, which the press said A/S Welch described as a failure, since it did not talk about important issues such as the situation and Lebanon, and because of the absence of important Arab leaders.

2. Local Headlines:

-- Arabic daily Al Arab:

"Welch: I discussed in Doha strengthening relations and regional problems."

-- Arabic daily Al Raya:

"Welch: I discussed with the Prime Minister boosting relations."

"Welch: The Arab Summit failed because it failed to address key issues."

-- Arabic daily Al Watan:

"Welch: Electing a Lebanese president should be done according to the constitution, not through the Arab initiative."

-- Arabic daily Al Sharq:

"Welch: Damascus Summit failed Arab failed to address key issues."

"Welch: The low level of representation in the summit was a result of the Syrian policy in Lebanon."

"Welch: Not commenting on the Arab initiative (toward Lebanon) does not mean that we reject it."

-- English daily Qatar Tribune:

"U.S. wants GCC allies to embrace Iraq."

"David Welch terms the recent Arab league summit a damp squib but denies U.S. role."

-- English daily The Peninsula:

"Arabs failed to address key issues."

-- English Daily Gulf Times:

"Observer role for U.S. at Arab summit urged."

13. BLOCK QUOTE:

"Observer role for U.S. at Arab summit urged."

Semi-Independent English daily "Gulf Times", (04/02)

"The U.S. should be invited as an observer at the Arab summit in Qatar next year, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch said yesterday. "I don't see why the U.S. can't be invited as an observer to the summit. Every one accuses us of interfering in the affairs of the region anyway. Might as well make it simpler by having us at a regional summit," said Welch. He was in Qatar as a follow-up to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's recent visits to the Middle East. He said his meetings with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused on "bilateral relations and regional issues such as Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and the just concluded Arab summit."

"The talks with the Qatari government last night were aimed at increasing the understanding between the two countries. I always respect their view and advice. We have plans for the GCC region, which you will see take place in a few weeks," Welch said. This is an important time in the region. We face challenges together. Progress has been made on some of the issues, while we hope that much more progress can still be made," said Welch, who has served in key U.S. embassies in the region.

"The Arab summit failed because of the absence of key players. Unfortunately, it continues to fail due to the problems within the Arabs," he said. Asked about the perception that the U.S. had pressured countries and leaders in the region not to attend the summit because Syria was hosting it, he said: "It is not that the

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U.S. was trying to isolate Syria. The country (Syria) itself has a number of ongoing and unresolved issues with its neighbors. It was never the intention of the U.S. to tell people not to go." "We in the U.S. are more interested in the outcomes of such summits, and not who attends them. We are only interested in seeing progress and the substance," he added.

Regarding Yemen's initiative to resolve the dispute between Fatah and Hamas, he said: "Dialogues for the sake of dialogues are not really fruitful. Any agreements between the Palestinian parties have to be with the agreement of the Quartet. We have to understand that the 'two states' is the only solution to this problem."

On Iran, Welch said: "I don't think there will ever be a flare-up from my side. However, the Iranian side is known to behave recklessly. We'd like to resolve the nuclear issues diplomatically. Unfortunately, Iran doesn't want to go on that path."

On the possibility of Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt sweeping to power in true democratic elections, he said: "Yes in all earnestness that is a possibility. But then it will be our right to decide whether to deal with them or not. We (the U.S.) will have to accept the results however."

"But it's simplistic to talk about elections as part of a representative system. We believe there should be more civic participation. The role of NGOs and media is more important if such elections were to take place. Popular participation is really essential," he added.

When asked why U.S. President George W. Bush is so unpopular around the world, Welch said: "He's a man of strong beliefs and that sometimes makes people uncomfortable. To him the image of the U.S. is very important, and so is the national security."

RATNEY